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SUBJECT: DJIBOUTIAN OPPOSITION MEDIA THEMES, OCTOBER 27-28, 2004

1. (U) Summary: The opposition journals during the week of October 24-28 focused on the alleged complaint against La Realite for slander filed by the Minister of Defense; the designation of the successor to Ahmed Dini Ahmed as president of the Republican Alliance for Democracy (ARD); and the distribution of school kits funded by United States Agency for International Development (USAID) in Djibouti. End Summary.

2. (U) La Realite, published by the opposition party Republican Alliance for Democracy (ARD) reported October 27 that the Minister of Defense has lodged a complaint against the paper as a whole. The editor in Chief and his deputy were called to a hearing before the police for arguments. The story begins with an article published in the Realite one-week prior, October 20, concerning the Armed Forces inauguration of an air liaison linking Djibouti to the northern city of Obock. This liaison is meant to provide easier access to Obock, which is not easily reachable for common people.

3. (U) The decision to establish a regular connection to Obock via military aircraft at the rate of USD 22.50 for a round trip was criticized by the opposition. The trip normally involves traveling overland a distance of 235 km by rough roads. The air liaison is direct and reduces the trip to 70 km. ARD denounced the action stating, "Army intrusion into the private economy is the last thing that a citizen should expect from the military institution." The Minister of Defense, acting for the Army has introduced a legal procedure against the paper. Realite's report cites defamation as the charge but does not go into detail on the Minister's complaint. (Note: Embassy has not been able to reach contacts at the Ministry of Justice to verify or get further details of the Minister's charges against La Realite. End Note.) A trial date is not yet fixed.

4. (U) La Realite reported 27 October that the opposition coalition, Union for Democratic Alliance (UAD) has finally designated a new president after the preceding Ahmed Dini in August. The current vice-president of UAD, Ismail Guedi Hared has been chosen to lead the coalition to the presidential elections of April 2005.

5. (U) Le Renouveau, the newspaper issued by the Movement for Democratic Renewal (MRD) published two articles concerning the donation of school kits by the U.S government and the speech of the U.S Ambassador during the ceremony. The paper first reported that on October 21, the U.S Ambassador, "has given 46,500 kits for students and 750 other kits for teachers and classes". This donation was made under a USD 1.6 million program funded by USAID, but managed through UNICEF, said the article. The goal of this aid, as reported, is to assist the national education efforts and guarantee a better access to education by rehabilitating school infrastructures in rural and urban zones. The paper said: "we came to know that an efficient distribution plan was set to ensure that materials go to their destination between 30 October and 3 November. The logistical support is jointly assured by the U.S military bureau for civil actions in Camp Lemonier and the Djibouti Armed Forces." Concerning the distribution, the paper continued, "we're noticing here an effort for transparency by the American authorities that do not ignore the bad governance in place so they can ensure that materials arrive to their destinations."

6. (U) The second article contained the speech by Ambassador Ragsdale printed in its entirety, which highlighted the honor of giving the supplies in the name of the U.S government to the Djiboutian Ministry of Education. Le Renouveau did not comment on the speech but highlighted Ambassador Ragsdale's remark that her government considers that every child has the right to receive a basic education and that the responsibility of ensuring that each child attends school is, in her opinion, the task of parents." The article also reported that the Ambassador affirmed that the U.S government has not only committed itself to raise the number of children that have access to education, but also to improve the quality of education.